



# Harford County Health Department

## 2004 Health Profile

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Revised  
Oct 2005



Harford County Health Department  
119 Hays Street, Bel Air, Maryland 21014  
(410) 638-8400 / (410) 879-2404  
[www.harfordcountymd.gov/health](http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/health)

# Message from the Health Officer

Historically, public health has primarily focused on identifying and preventing the spread of communicable disease. Fifty years ago, this year, Jonas Salk produced the first successful vaccine against the crippling disease known as polio. For Americans, polio has become a disease found only in medical textbooks. This vaccine was distributed to the public through the public health network and is a classic example of the practice of public health and the value of having a strong local health department.

But as important as this work was, and still is to our public safety, times are changing and public health must change too. For the first time, life expectancy tables are leveling off. No longer can we be assured that our children will live to an age older than our parents. This is extremely worrisome as the major contributors to this trend are all life-style and behavior issues. Diseases, like heart disease, cancer, asthma, and diabetes are now the greatest threats to our health. No vaccine, no single medication, or dietary fad is going to correct these problems. These diseases are complex and solutions will not be easy to identify.

Our vision for Harford County is clear, *Harford County, the Healthiest County in Maryland*. The Health Department staff is committed to leadership and service, working with you, our partners, towards our shared goals. This document is a first step. It identifies and quantifies the key contributors of disease and death in Harford County. It is designed to serve as a platform for community wide discussion and dialogue; new programs, innovative solutions, and new sources of funding will hopefully follow.

I encourage you to use this resource as we work together to bridge the gap towards better health for our County.

Sincerely,



Andrew Bernstein, M.D., M.P.H.  
Health Officer  
Harford County Health Department



# About the Harford County Health Department

## ***Vision***

Harford County, the healthiest county in Maryland.

## ***Mission***

To protect and promote the health, safety and environment of the citizens of Harford County through community assessment, education, collaboration and assurance of services.

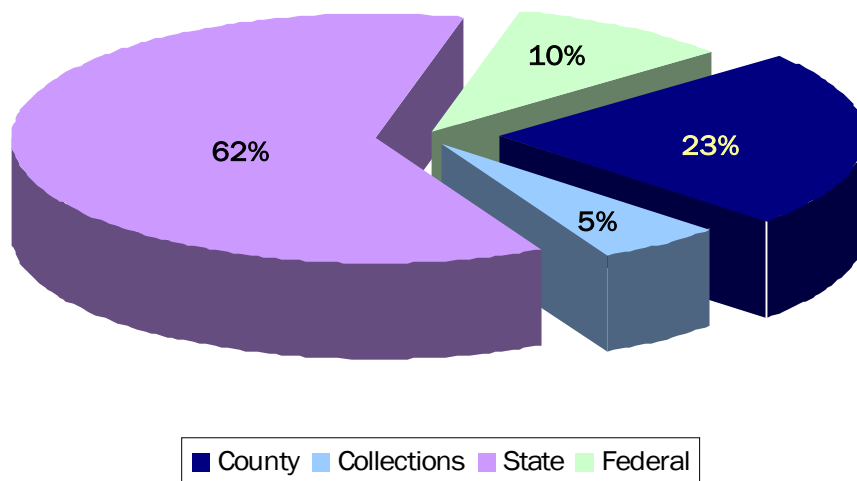
## ***Description***

The Harford County Health Department functions as the local operating arm of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) in Harford County and is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of preventive health care, clinical services, and environmental health services to citizens in Harford County. The Harford County Health Department has been at 119 Hays Street in Bel Air since the early 1950's.

The Department employs approximately 225 people and has an annual net budget in excess of 15 million dollars. The Health Department receives funding from three main sources: Maryland, the Federal Government, and Harford County (see chart below for details).

The Health Department has seven major Divisions: Administration, Addictions, Environmental Health, Health Education, Health Services, Nursing, and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children). The majority of services are offered in the Bel Air area, but the Health Department also provides a variety of services at health centers in Aberdeen, Edgewood, and Havre de Grace.

## **FY04 FUNDING SOURCES AND BUDGET**



County Funding	\$3,525,039
Collections	\$839,808
State Funding	\$9,369,804
Federal Funding	~\$1,500,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,234,651</b>

# Executive Summary

**“There are no social, no industrial, no economic problems which are not related to the problems of health.” -William Henry Welch**

Overall, Harford County is in relatively good health. The population continues to grow and the quality of health care remains high. In order to achieve our vision of *Harford County as the healthiest county in Maryland*, it is essential to provide the community with information on the current health status of our County. This 2004 Health Profile provides a brief overview of the health issues faced by our residents.

The health indicators chosen for this report show that infants born in Harford County begin life well with rates of infant mortality and premature births that are far lower than the state and national averages. However, as we age, adults in Harford County appear to take on lifestyles which contribute excessively to rates of disease and death. Lung cancer is still the leading cause of cancer death in Harford County and compared to the rest of the state, our rates of new lung cancer cases are higher than the state average. Rates for colorectal and breast cancer are better, but still are high relative to national trends. In addition, 41% of our adult population is currently overweight and almost one-third are obese.

It is difficult to accurately determine what these behavioral choices and life-styles cost in real dollars, but a nationally recognized and peer reviewed website<sup>1</sup> provides a useful tool to measure the true cost of physical inactivity (a leading contributor to each of these ailments). This model indicates that Harford County currently loses over \$247 million dollars annually in lost wages, productivity, and health costs related to physical inactivity.

Harford County has not seen a dramatic change in the rates of communicable diseases. Our rates of HIV and AIDS continue to be stable and are still far lower than the rest of the state. There has been a gradual increase in the rate of chlamydia infections but this can be attributed to changes in technology that allow greater convenience in testing over previous methods, and this mirrors the rates found nationwide.

The environment presents a unique challenge to our County. Although we are fortunate to have a desirable mix of suburban and rural communities, our air quality continues to be below acceptable standards for healthy living. Our proximity to large urban areas, like Baltimore, weather patterns and topography are largely to blame. From 2001-2003, our County experienced 3 code purple days, 15 code red days and 38 code orange days. These are days when the amount of ground level ozone in the ambient air can cause difficulty breathing for the frail, elderly, and those with chronic respiratory diseases like asthma or emphysema.

The Harford County Health Department offers a variety of programs that are designed to address these issues. This document, however, points out a number of areas where we as individuals can make a difference in our own health and wellbeing. Contrary to popular belief, minor changes in diet and activity do make a difference. If just 5% of our citizens adopted a more active lifestyle, Harford County could save over \$12 million dollars per year.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Website: <http://www.activelivingleadership.org/costcalculator/coi.php>

## Harford County Demographics

		Harford		Maryland
		2002	2003	2003
Total Population, Estimated		227,713	232,175	5,508,909
GENDER				
	Male	49%	49%	48%
	Female	51%	51%	52%
RACE				
	White	88%	88%	66%
	Black	10%	10%	29%
	Other Races	2%	2%	5%
AGE				
	< 15 years	22%	22%	21%
	15 – 24 years	13%	13%	13%
	25 – 44 years	30%	29%	30%
	45 – 64 years	24%	25%	25%
	65+ years	11%	11%	11%

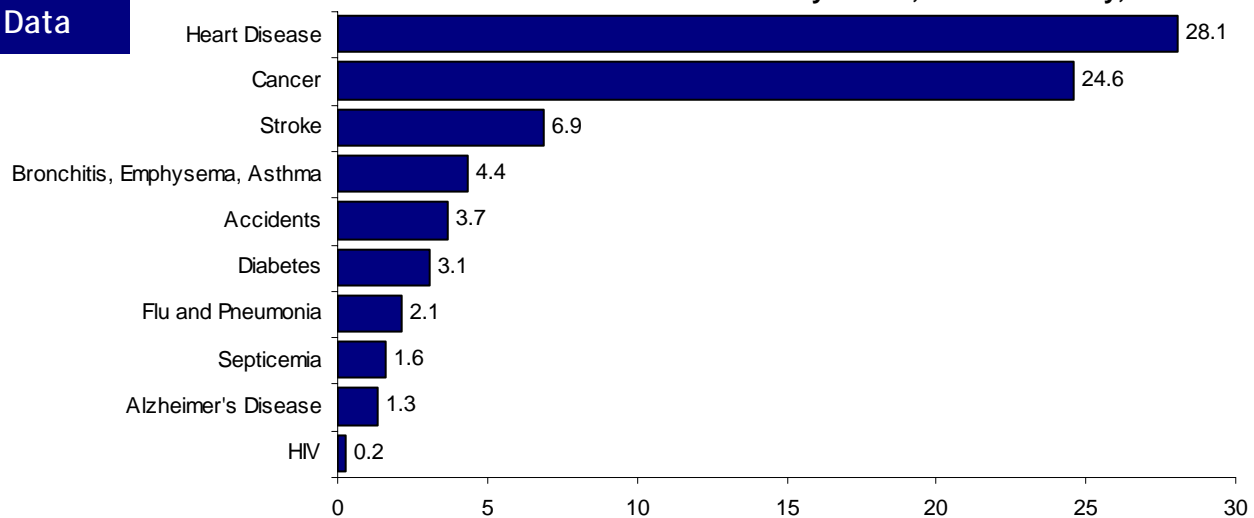
Source: Maryland Vital Statistics Administration

For additional demographic data, visit the Harford County Government website at: <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov>

# Leading Causes of Death

## Data

Percent Distribution of Deaths by Cause, Harford County, 2003



Source: Maryland Vital Statistics Administration, Division of Health Statistics

Comparison of the Leading Causes of Death

10 Leading Causes of Death 2003	Harford vs. MD 2003	Harford vs. US 2003*	Harford 2003 vs. Harford 1999	Harford vs. MD 2001-2003
Heart Disease	Better	Better	Worse	Worse
Cancer	Better	Better	Worse	Better
Stroke	Same	Better	Worse	Worse
Bronchitis, Emphysema, Asthma	Better	Better	Same	Better
Accidents	Worse	Better	Worse	Worse
Diabetes	Better	Better	Worse	Better
Flu and Pneumonia	Better	Better	Same	Same
Septicemia	Better	Same	Better	Better
Alzheimer's Disease	Better	Better	Same	Worse
HIV	**	**	**	**
* US 2003 Data is Preliminary				
**Death rates not calculated for Harford County since there were fewer than 20 deaths.				

## Discussion

In 2003, there were 1,653 deaths among residents of Harford County. Of these deaths, the top three leading causes in Harford County were heart disease, cancer and stroke. When you compare the death rates to the state of Maryland in 2003, Harford County had lower death rates in all of the leading causes except stroke (which was the same) and accidents (which was higher). For death rates averaged over the three year period from 2001-2003 (which accounts for year to year fluctuations), Harford County had higher death rates of heart disease, stroke, accidents, and Alzheimer's Disease when compared to the state of Maryland.

Motor vehicle accidents contribute to more than half of all accident deaths. The motor vehicle accident death rate for Harford County remains higher than the state averages (14.6 per 100,000 population in Harford County vs. 12.7 in Maryland in 2003).

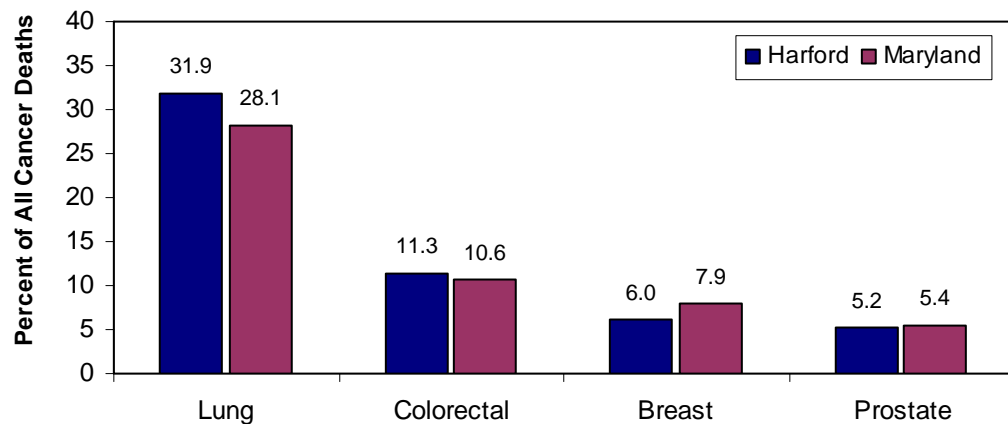
Heart disease and stroke continue to top the list both locally and nationally. Two risk factors associated with these diseases are high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. Both are controllable through life-style change and medication, and monitored through routine testing. The American Heart Association recommends that if you are 20 years or older, you should have your cholesterol checked every 5 years and your blood pressure checked every 2 years.



# Cancer

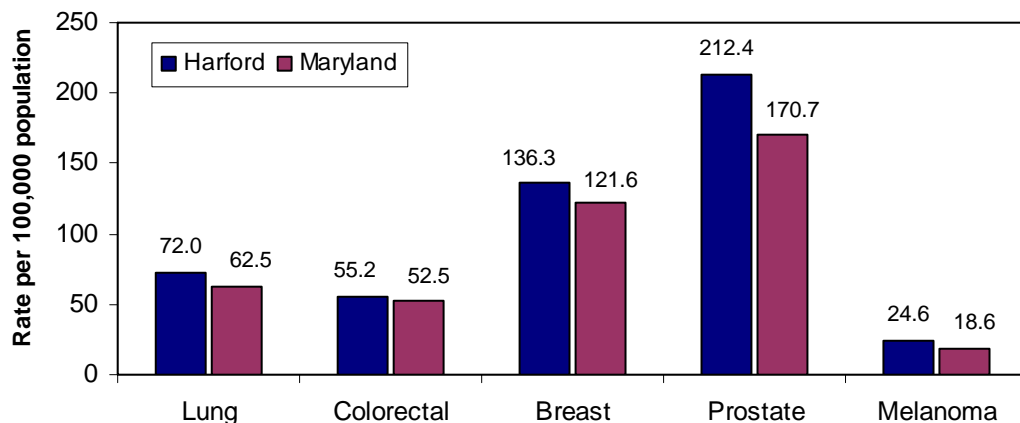
## Data

**Cancer Deaths by Type**  
**Harford County vs. Maryland, 2001**



Source: Maryland Vital Statistics Administration, Division of Health Statistics

**Rate of New Cancer Cases**  
**Harford County vs. Maryland, 2001**



Rates are age adjusted to the 2000 U.S. Standard Population

Source: Maryland Cancer Registry

## Discussion

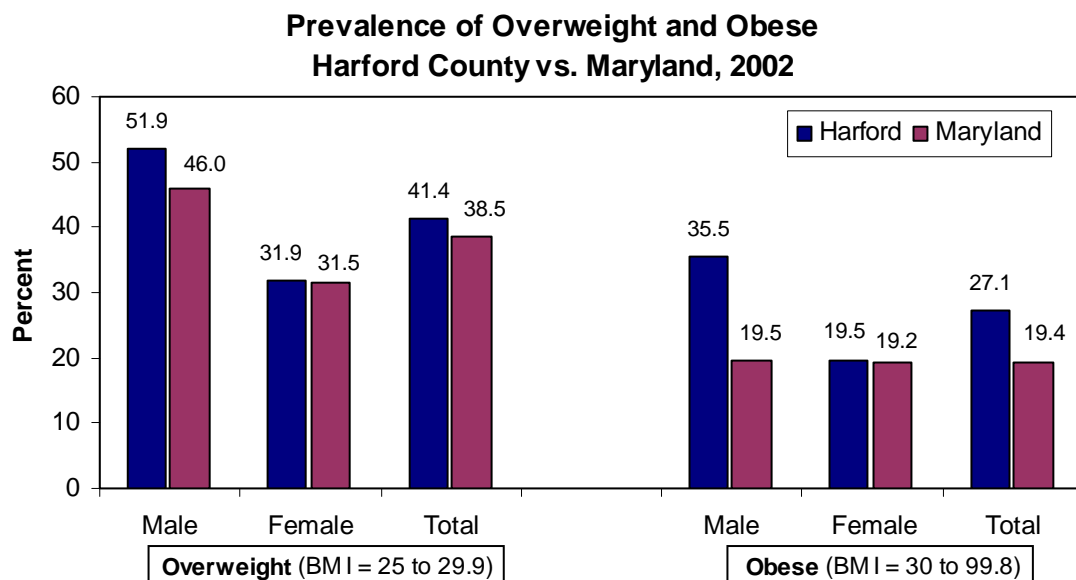
Overall in Harford County, cancer death rates have decreased over recent years (207.6 per 100,000 population in 1999 to 195.1 in 2003). Still, cancer is the second leading cause of death in Harford County.

In 2001, the leading causes of cancer deaths among Harford County residents include lung cancer, colorectal cancer, breast cancer, and prostate cancer. As for newly diagnosed cancer cases, prostate and breast cancer were the two leading causes of new cancers in Harford County residents.

As Harford County residents age, the burden of cancer will increase. Steps that can be taken to reduce the number of new cancer cases and cancer deaths include the promotion of healthy behaviors such as exercise, improved diet, smoking prevention and cessation. Proper screening, such as the use of mammograms and colonoscopies, are effective to detect cancers at an early stage when they are more treatable.

# Overweight, Obesity, and Physical Activity

## Data



BMI = Body Mass Index

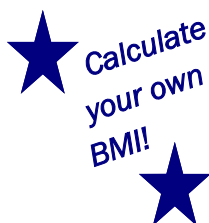
Source: Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2002

## Discussion

Obesity has risen at an alarming rate in the US over the past 20 years. People that are obese are at a higher risk for physical conditions such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, elevated cholesterol, coronary heart disease and stroke.

In Harford County, the male population is more overweight and obese (as calculated by Body Mass Index) than the state averages while the female population tends to be about the same as the state averages.

Based on a physical inactivity cost calculation through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, physical inactivity costs the county an estimated \$247 million dollars per year (or about \$1500 per person) in medical care costs, workers compensation costs, and lost productivity. If as little as 5% of inactive people in Harford County become physically active, it could save an estimated \$12 million dollars per year.



The Body Mass Index (BMI) is defined as a number that shows body weight adjusted for height. It is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{BMI} = (\text{Weight in Pounds} / \text{Height in Inches}^2) \times 703$$

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 – 24.9	Normal

BMI	Weight Status
25.0 – 29.9	Overweight
30.0 and above	Obese

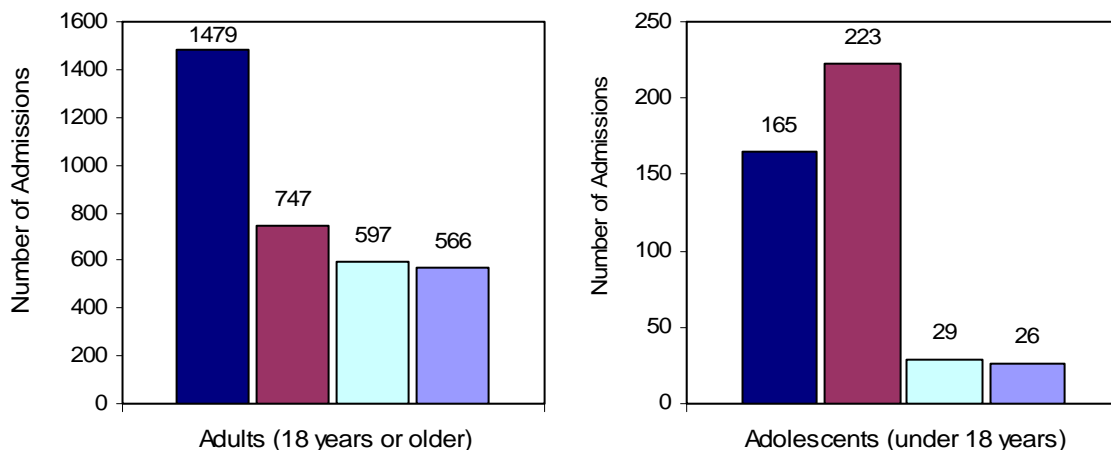
Those who have a BMI of 30 or greater are at a significant risk and should speak to their doctor for further guidance. Those with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 should seek counseling and consider lifestyle changes to reduce their long term risk.

Regular physical activity is good for overall health. Physical activity decreases the risk for colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It also helps to control weight, contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints, reduces falls among the elderly, and helps to relieve the pain of arthritis. Physical activity does not have to be strenuous to be beneficial. Moderate physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking five or more times a week, also has health benefits.

# Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco

## Data

**Substance Related Admissions\*, Harford County, 2004**

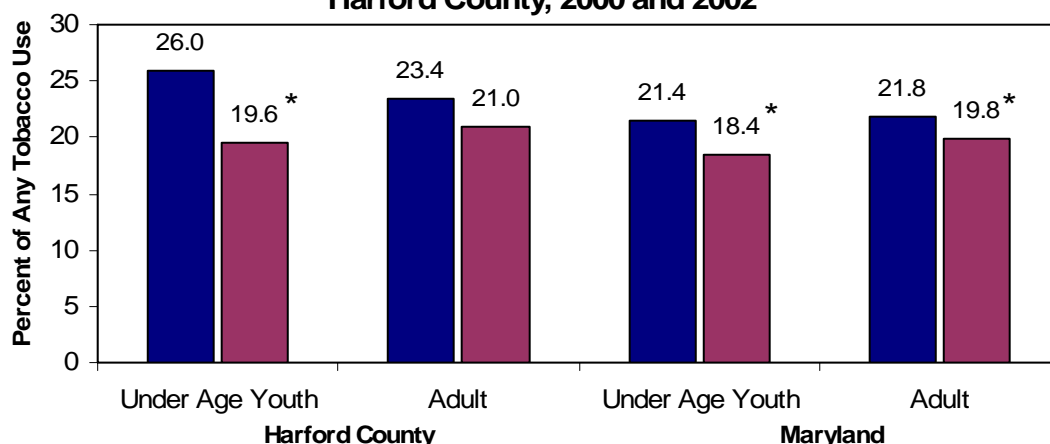


\* Note: Some patients may have indicated more than one substance upon admission and therefore may be counted in more than one category.

Source: Maryland Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration

■ Alcohol ■ Marijuana ■ Heroin ■ Cocaine/Crack

**Prevalence of Any Tobacco Use in Youth and Adults  
Harford County, 2000 and 2002**



\* indicates change from 2000 was statistically significant

Source: Tobacco Use Behaviors In MD Report, DHMH, Sept 2003

■ 2000 ■ 2002

## Discussion

The leading substances of abuse in Harford County (as it is throughout the state), measured or self reported upon admission to an outpatient treatment program in 2004, were alcohol and marijuana. Recent national trends among adolescents indicate a decrease in the use of tobacco and marijuana and an increased abuse of prescription and over the counter drugs, and increased use of inhalants particularly in the younger, middle school kids.

Tobacco use in Harford County has decreased in recent years (from 26.0% to 19.6% in underage youth and from 23.4% to 21.0% in adults from 2000 to 2002).

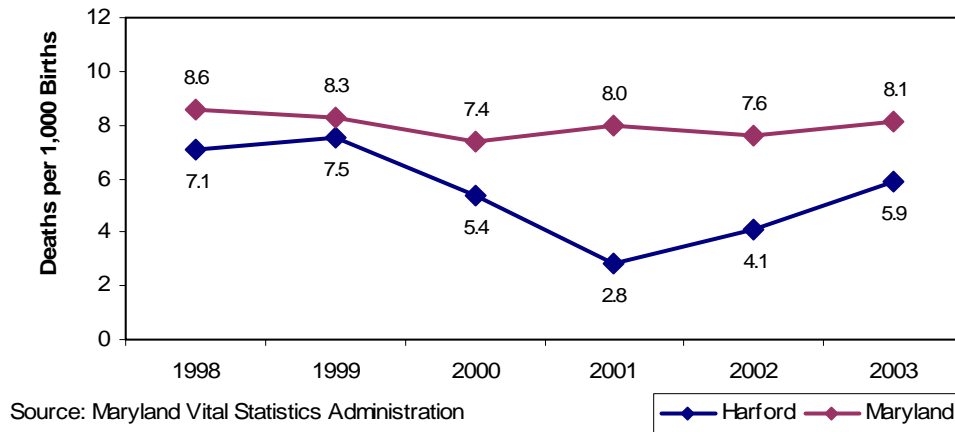
Substance abuse problems present many challenges. While community prevention is essential, individual responsibility can also play an important role. By taking steps such as not allowing "underage" drinking at parties, shrugging off drug use as youthful experimentation, taking away car keys from someone who has been drinking, and working with community groups to support education and prevention of substance abuse, we can work together toward a healthier community.



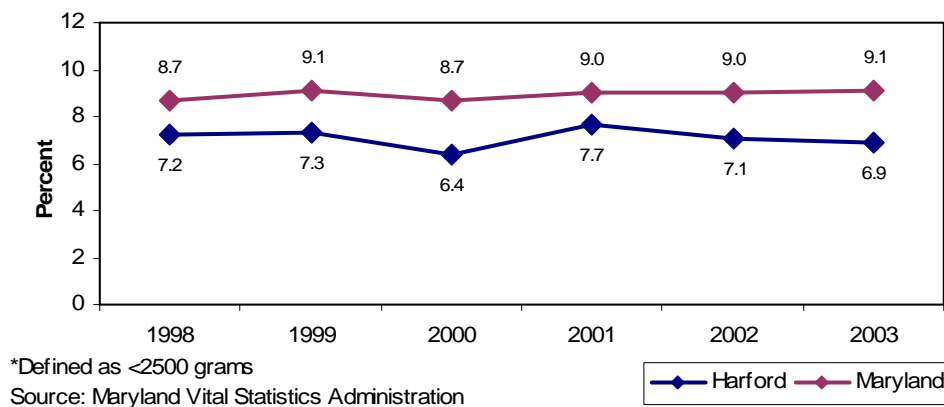
# Infant Health

## Data

**Infant Mortality Rates**  
**Harford County vs. Maryland, 1998-2003**



**Percent of Low Birth Weight\* Infants**  
**Harford County vs. Maryland, 1998 - 2003**



## Discussion

In 2003, there were an estimated 2,954 births in Harford County.

Although there are small fluctuations from year to year, Harford County's infant mortality rate and percentage of low birth weight babies have been relatively stable and consistently lower than Maryland's over the last few years.

Infant mortality rates (deaths of infants less than one year old compared to the number of births that year) are used to compare the health and well being of various populations. The leading causes of infant death include congenital abnormalities, pre-term/low birth weight, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), problems related to pregnancy, and respiratory distress syndrome.

A healthy birth weight is important for a baby's good start in life. Babies that are born of a low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams or 5.5 lbs) tend to have a higher risk for health problems (such as respiratory conditions and cerebral palsy) and developmental problems (such as vision and learning disabilities).

Methods to decrease the rates of infant mortality and low birth rates include modifying the behaviors, lifestyles, and conditions that affect birth outcomes, such as smoking, substance abuse, poor nutrition, lack of prenatal care, medical problems, and chronic illness.

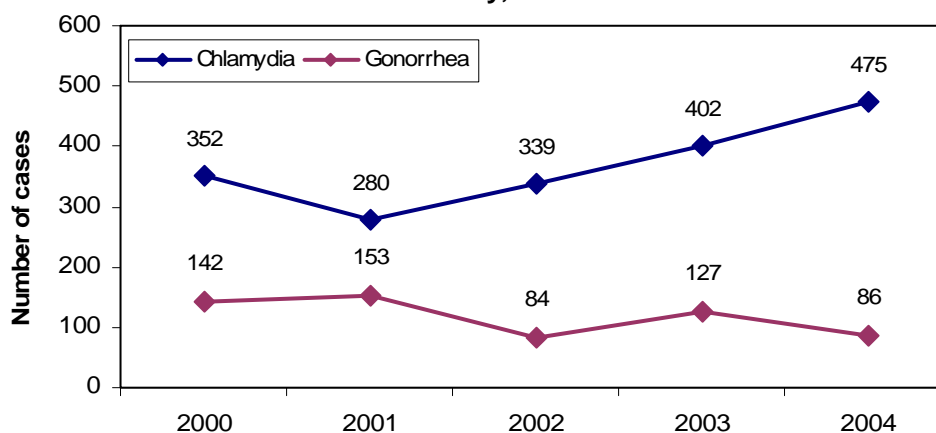
# Communicable Diseases

## Data

2003 DATA	Harford County	Maryland
<b>HIV</b>		
New cases of HIV (Rate per 100,000 pop)	7.3	36.8
Current cases of HIV (Rate per 100,000 pop)	63.6	291.5
Male (%)	65%	62%
Female (%)	35%	38%
<b>AIDS</b>		
New cases of AIDS (Rate per 100,000 pop)	8.7	26.9
Current cases of AIDS (Rate per 100,000 pop)	72.7	238.0
Male (%)	72%	69%
Female (%)	28%	31%

Source: Maryland AIDS Administration

**Confirmed Cases of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea  
Harford County, 2000 - 2004**



Source: HCHD Communicable Diseases

## Discussion

It is essential to track communicable diseases such as sexually transmitted diseases and HIV in order to determine the health status of a community. Two significant indicators of health status for Harford County are HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia and gonorrhea.

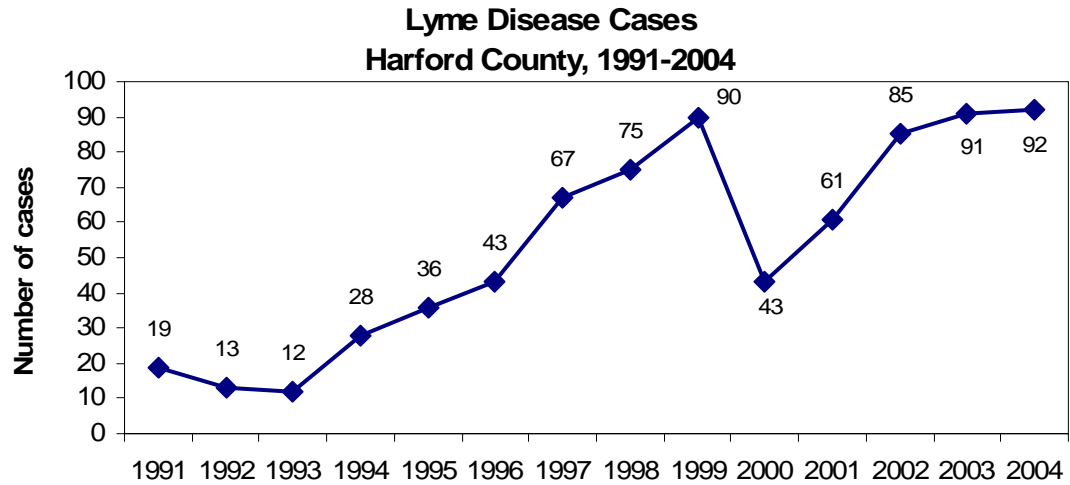
The rates of new and current cases of HIV/AIDS in Harford County are lower than that of Maryland. The distribution of HIV/AIDS cases is similar among males and females for both Harford County and Maryland.

Chlamydia cases have increased on a state and national level. This increase is most likely due to an increase in reported cases, expansion of screening efforts, and the use of increasingly sensitive diagnostic tests, rather than an actual increase in chlamydia infections.

The best way to avoid transmission of a sexually transmitted disease or HIV/AIDS is to abstain from sexual contact or to be in a long term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can also reduce the risk of transmission.

# Environmental Health

## Data



Source: HCHD Communicable Diseases

### High Ozone Days, Top 5 Maryland Counties, 2001 – 2003

County	Orange	Red	Purple	Weighted Average
Harford*	38	15	3	22.2
Anne Arundel	40	16	0	21.3
Prince George's	39	6	1	16.7
Cecil	33	7	1	15.2
Baltimore County	33	7	0	14.5

Source: American Lung Association: State of the Air 2005 Report

**Orange:** Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, **Red:** Unhealthy, **Purple:** Very Unhealthy

\* Harford County is the 17th Most Ozone Polluted County in the Nation

## Discussion

Environmental factors also have an influence on the public's health. Environmental hazards include those that affect the air, water, land, and food as well as diseases that are spread by animals and insects.

### Lyme Disease

Lyme disease remains a concern in Harford County. With an exception in 2000-2001, the number of confirmed Lyme disease cases has begun to level off in Harford County. This trend follows the state experience. Protecting yourself when outdoors is the most effective way to prevent getting Lyme disease. Some precautions that can be taken are avoiding areas likely to be infested with ticks, wearing light colored clothing so that ticks can be spotted more easily, wearing long sleeved shirts and pants tucked into your socks, and applying insect repellents containing DEET.

### Ozone

Elevated amounts of ground level ozone can contribute to difficulties breathing for individuals with chronic respiratory illnesses like asthma and emphysema. Due to Harford County's location in the Susquehanna River Basin and common weather patterns, particulate and ozone pollution is often imported from the Ohio River Valley or big urban areas like Washington, DC or Baltimore. When Code Red or Purple days are issued, outdoor activities should be limited. Some steps that you can personally take on Code Red or Purple days to reduce your exposure to harmful pollution are: refueling your car after dusk, reducing driving by taking public transportation, carpooling, or telecommuting, and avoiding using gas powered lawn equipment.

# Harford County Health Department Programs

The following is a selection of the programs that the health department offers.

## Addictions and Mental Health

- Harford County Juvenile Drug Court
- Teen Diversion Program for adolescents with psychiatric illnesses
- Adult and adolescent drug and alcohol counseling

## Administration

- Issue birth and death certificates
- Coordination of Medical Assistance transportation

## Cancer

- Colon, cervical, and breast cancer screening for those individuals who qualify
- Local educational programs for skin and prostate cancer

## Communicable Disease

- Ongoing screening and monitoring of infectious diseases: tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, and immunizations
- Investigative interviewing and interventions for community outbreaks

## Health Education

- Youth and adult smoking cessation
- Youth tobacco education
- Employee wellness
- Community health presentations and health fairs

## Emergency Preparedness

- Develops policies and procedures for health department response to all hazards
- Coordinates with other emergency response organizations

## Environmental Health

- Water sampling and soil testing
- Reviews subdivision plans, demolition proposals, building permit applications
- Issues well, sewage disposal system, and burning permits
- Licenses and inspects food service facilities and public swimming pools
- Investigates communicable and zoonotic diseases, food-related outbreaks, and environmental complaints
- Conducts inspections of foster/adoptive homes
- Handles vector/rabies control

## Mature Adult Services

- Assist older adults with services to help adults stay independent
- Coordinate home-based personal care
- Link with primary care
- Refer to community resources

## Women's Health

- Breast and cervical cancer screening and treatment
- Family planning services
- Pregnancy testing
- Home visiting programs for pregnant women and new mothers

## Health Services

- HIV diagnosis, counseling, treatment, and case management services provided in collaboration with Johns Hopkins Hospital
- Early intervention services to developmentally delayed children
- School Health Readiness Program
- Dental sealant program
- Primary care services
- Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP)

## Infant, Children and Adolescent Health

- Nutrition programs for pregnant women and children (WIC)
- Vision and hearing testing
- Case management for children with lead poisoning
- Assistance with linking children to medical, housing, financial, educational, and mental health services
- Review of children and infant deaths
- School-based health care

## Websites

Harford County Health Department: [www.harfordcountymd.gov/health](http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/health)

Harford County Government: [www.harfordcountymd.gov](http://www.harfordcountymd.gov)

Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: [www.dhmf.state.md.us](http://www.dhmf.state.md.us)

## Questions?

If you have any questions about the information contained in this report, please call the Health Education & Planning Division at (410) 638-8405.

## Contributors

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